

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
Mayor Scott W. Lang
March 19, 2009

Good afternoon honorable citizens of New Bedford; Roy Nascimento, President of the New Bedford Chamber of Commerce, and officers and members of the New Bedford Chamber of Commerce; John Saunders, President of the City Council, and the members of the City Council, members of our School Committee, members of our Board of Assessors, Senator Montigny, and, as they are in session, I want to acknowledge our Representatives; Cabral, Koczera, Quinn, and Canessa, I would like to recognize Ines Goncalves-Drolet representing Congressman Frank. I welcome Governor's Councilor Carol Fiola, District Attorney Sam Sutter. Welcome to School Superintendent Portia Bonner and BCC President Jack Sbrega. Welcome to Tony Sapienza, the President of the New Bedford Economic Development Council and all of its members, and its Executive Director, Matthew Morrissey, Rev. David Lima of the InterChurch Council, and Reverend Mark Green of the NAACP, all of our clergy and all representatives of higher education.

I want to acknowledge our neighboring Select Boards and guests, all City employees and all of you listening to this broadcast on the radio from your homes, businesses and automobiles and those who will view this from your homes on New Bedford's Cable Access channel—thank you for being with us today.

Once again, I am grateful to have the privilege of working with an extremely dedicated and talented group of elected officials and public servants who have the best interests of New Bedford at heart: Governor Deval Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray, Secretary of State William Francis Galvin, Attorney General Martha Coakley, Treasurer Timothy Cahill, and Auditor Joseph DeNucci; Senator Edward Kennedy, for whom I ask a prayer for good health, Senator

John Kerry, and Congressman Barney Frank, Governor's Councilor Carole Fiola, District Attorney Sam Sutter, Sheriff Tom Hodgson, our state senator, our state representatives, City Council President John Saunders and Ward Councilors Linda Morad, Steve Martins, Bruce Duarte, Jane Gonsalves, Wendy Pimental, At-Large Councilors Brian Gomes, David Alves, Debora Coelho, and Denis Lawrence; School Committee members, Jack Nobrega, Vice Chairman John Fletcher, Eric Pope, Tom Clarke, Marlene Pollack and Jill Ussach. It is incumbent upon me to thank and acknowledge Consul Fernanda Coelho of the Consulate of Portugal. She has dedicated her service to the people of New Bedford; we will greatly miss her, her husband Louis, and her two girls when they return to Portugal. Let us thank our hosts today, Café Funchal and the DaSilva family.

I would like to express a special thank you to my wife, Gig Lang, who has worked tirelessly with all of you over the past year on many projects which make New Bedford a very special place for our children, our seniors and our citizens. I also want to thank my kids for understanding the personal time commitment this office requires.

This is my fourth State of the City Address. Each year, the Mayor of the City of New Bedford presents the State of the City Address to its citizens. It is my honor and obligation to inform our citizens of the overall condition of our City on, thankfully, the last day of this long winter season. I am sure that spring will bring blessings of warm weather and bright days ahead for New Bedford.

Over the past 3 years, I have pledged to lead a government predicated on honesty and transparency, a government that is dedicated to serve all of the people of New Bedford. Today I pledge once again to lead the City in this manner.

I believed that the fundamental responsibilities of local government are, providing safe desirable neighborhoods, excellent educational opportunities for all of our children and quality City services that reflect the pride of our City workers, and instill confidence in our residents,

and, just as importantly, to promote and foster economic development, which will provide jobs for our citizens and expand our tax base. This past year, the government of the City of New Bedford continued its quest to meet these responsibilities.

For the past three years, I have published a yearly report to the citizens of New Bedford. Today I promulgated the report for 2008. In the early years of New Bedford's history, such reports were commonplace. Presenting this information on the status of the City offers vital information to our citizens. This report describes much of the work that was done by the dedicated men and women who are employed by the City of New Bedford. The work described in this report could not be accomplished without the help and cooperation of its citizens, whether as volunteers, or while serving as members of boards or commissions, or by our elected officials. The calendar year 2008 was very productive for our City government and our citizens, and I am confident that New Bedford will continue its good work in 2009. The report can be obtained at City Hall, our libraries, and viewed on the City of New Bedford's website. (www.NewBedford-MA.GOV).

I am honored to report on the State of the City on this day, March 19, 2009. This is my fourth State of the City speech and I can assure you that the economic circumstances today are much different than during the previous three State of the City addresses, and in fact, perhaps, are different from any time in our City's history.

Since the last State of the City speech, and specifically over the past six months, the financial stability of the United States of America has been dramatically affected. A year ago I spoke of a national recession that appeared to be looming on the horizon. Today we are dealing with an economic downturn in our country that approaches the most severe economic crisis in our country's history. It would be foolhardy and delusional for me to indicate that our City has not suffered the same economic loss as every city and town in our state and country. New Bedford has an unemployment rate that rivals the highest in the state, and its families,

whether those whose careers are in the private sector or those who have worked for the public, have suffered job loss and a loss of overall financial security.

Parents lie awake at night wondering if they will be able to take care of their children. Seniors fear that their retirement benefits or Social Security checks will not see them through their later years. Young people wonder if the economy will have careers for them and whether they will be at a level that will allow them to realize their "American Dream."

This economic crisis came about as a result of poor judgment, lack of accountability, and risky investments which all led to the devaluing of the strongest economy in the history of the world.

At this very moment, President Obama and his entire administration, as well as the Congress are fashioning remedial programs designed to bolster the financial institutions, provide jobs and restore confidence in the neighborhoods of America. We wish them well and we pray for their success.

New Bedford enters this recessionary period with tremendous momentum in many ways. We have made strides in keeping our City safe, in addressing our educational needs, in revitalizing our neighborhoods, and in bringing economic development to the City. However, this national, state and local economic calamity will require everyone in this room and every one of our City employees and citizens to unite behind the concept of a greater good.

New Bedford, throughout its history, has been very much dependent upon global, national and state economic trends and over the past three decades our City has not fared well regarding blue collar manufacturing jobs. This has resulted in the need to recreate a middle class job base that will ensure the future viability of our City. Tremendous progress has been made in the Business Park under the New Bedford Industrial Foundation and its Executive Director, Tom Davis, in drawing new businesses and expanding some of our familiar manufacturing companies. In addition, other areas of our City have seen job growth in

alternative energy research and development and manufacturing, consumer and industrial light manufacturing, textiles and customer service sectors. We have also experienced an expansion in the restaurant and entertainment and tourism sector. However, the need to create jobs which pay living wages with benefits is ever-present. Certainly, during this economic crisis, we are focused on retaining each and every job that we have in both the private and public sector and attempting to continue to create and lure additional jobs to New Bedford. Every day New Bedford presents itself to the entrepreneurs, developers and investors as the place to grow a business and a family.

As has been the case since my first State of the City address, our country is still at war, 7½ years after the terrorist attacks on the United States. New Bedford has men and women serving in the armed forces around the world, preserving our freedom. Allowing us to gather here today to enjoy each other's company and exercise our rights as Americans. Let's remember those brave men and women wearing our colors and their families, and all of our veterans, and I ask New Bedford to pray for their safety and their families.

New Bedford, which honors our veterans each day continued to expand our veterans' services in 2008. We now have the largest number of veteran clients receiving services in our City's history and the second highest number in the state. Our veteran medical van made 874 trips to bring clients to and from medical appointments. I want to thank our Veterans Agent, Dan LeBlanc for doing a fine job delivering veterans services to our veterans and their families.

City's Finances

The financial status of our City is stable. Over the past three years, we have seen New Bedford's bond rating be up-graded to an A3 category, savings hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest costs. We have certified, through the Department of Revenue, over \$15 million in free cash and working with the City Council, met many budget challenges in a successful manner.

A review of the current status of revenue shows that building permits are steady when compared to 2008. Real and personal property tax payments are within traditional tolerances. Our collections of past-due taxes are being pursued vigorously with very positive results. We currently have over 1,000 properties in tax title process and have collected \$1.3 million in back taxes over the past year.

This year will be extremely challenging in that the answer to our fiscal issues will not be found in raising property taxes or through increased local aid from the state. In February of this 2009, the state reduced our local aid allocation for Fiscal Year 2009 by \$2.8 million. This reduction in local aid caused many hardships for the employees of our City. The state has already indicated that in Fiscal Year 2010, our local aid will be cut by another \$8.1 million, and there are more recent projections that indicate that our local aid may be cut by as much as \$10.6 million. This cut will pose a daunting task as the budget for Fiscal 2010 is formulated. The financial issues we face must be met by paring down our costs. I look forward to working with the City Council on the Fiscal 2010 budget, to find cost-saving measures which will allow us to live within our revenue, and at the same time provide the necessary services for our citizens.

Foreclosures

The City has experienced increased levels of foreclosed houses which have led to abandoned and vacant properties. Our Department of Community Development, with several key departments in the City, including Police, Fire, Inspectional Services, Board of Health, Solicitors, DPI, and DPW, the Attorney General's Office and the District Attorney's Office have worked tirelessly to secure these properties and monitor them.

We are working very closely with numerous non-profit agencies, financial institutions and the state and federal government to put these houses back into productive use. Many of these houses will see families move in; however, those properties that cannot be rehabilitated

will be demolished. The lots will be offered for sale or converted to pocket parks, green space or community gardens. This will ensure that the vitality of the neighborhood is restored.

Public Safety

New Bedford has made very significant strides in the area of public safety over the past three years. I thank Police Chief Teachman, and Deputies Provencher and Hegarty for their commitment. In the area of violent crime the City has established a clear trend towards safer neighborhoods. However, there is much work upon which we need to focus.

The 2008 Crime statistics indicate that we face significant challenges in all categories of reported criminal activities. With a difficult economy, increased crime and police activity is predicted. Continued cooperation of the citizenry, with the New Bedford Police Department, the District Attorney's Office and all law enforcement agencies, is the key to pro-active intervention and the apprehension and conviction of the perpetrator. A special thanks to the HOPE Collaborative and Neighborhoods United in working to make New Bedford a safer place.

It is our responsibility as citizens to be aware of our surroundings and report any unusual or suspicious activities immediately to the authorities. We also must dedicate ourselves to mentoring our young people towards positive, constructive life choices.

Municipal Workforce

In regard to our City employees who have lost their jobs, who provide the daily vital services in the area of public safety, police, fire and ambulance service, maintenance work, construction work, customer service, professional and specialized services, I know that each day they perform their vital work with great dedication and expertise. If they were asked what their vocation was, they would proudly answer that they work for the Citizens of New Bedford. The cuts in local aid in 2009 were extremely cruel in that they came late in the fiscal year, forcing an increased number of layoffs to cover the shortfall with so few weeks left in the fiscal year. I

pledge to work with our federal and state elected officials, and the New Bedford City Council to bring back as many of our laid off employees as possible.

Two months ago, I proposed an alternative to layoffs which would require very significant sacrifices by all of our employees. I still firmly believe that in order to meet the reduction in local aid that has been announced for the up-coming Fiscal Year 2010, and a possible additional reduction based upon the State's revenue protections, we must band together and make financial sacrifices in order to avoid significant future layoffs.

Over the next several weeks, I will actively work with the City's unions to find common ground to preserve jobs.

If we work together in good faith we can find significant cost savings to avoid further layoffs. Quite frankly, I don't believe we have a choice, given the lack of alternatives individuals without a job confront in this economy. Assuming that a career with the City government is extremely valuable to an individual and their family, I strongly urge our employees to make short-term financial sacrifices in their wages and benefits in order to preserve theirs and as many of their fellow employees' jobs as possible.

Local Aid Cuts

It is clear to me that the current times will bring the absolute necessity for dramatic change in the way government conducts its daily affairs. In the past month, we have seen the effects of the reduction in our local aid for Fiscal Year 2009. We have suffered the loss of employees in very significant numbers which will dramatically affect the ability of our City government to serve its citizens.

A layoff of any individual, whether in the public or private sector, has a tremendous negative effect on the person laid off and his immediate family and friends. Every layoff alters the economic health of our entire community and feeds a self-fulfilling prophecy of continued economic downturn and despair. The negative social and communal effects of layoffs are

devastating to our City. Lives are altered, family stability is threatened and the quilt of our society is torn, leaving gaps to fill in our neighborhoods, churches, youth leagues and daily lives.

In the area of public safety, we have been forced to lay off individuals who have dedicated their lives to preserve the safety of ourselves and our loved ones. These layoffs in our public safety sector put our community at risk. It is unacceptable to provide assistance to foreign countries so that they can hire police and firefighters and emergency medical personnel to protect their nationals, when the City of New Bedford is struggling to ensure safety in our neighborhoods.

Financial Support for Public Safety

It is my position that the state government must provide a foundation stipend for public safety, similar to the foundation stipend for educational funding under Chapter 70. Cuts to police, fire and ambulance personnel are intolerable in any urban setting and specifically in New Bedford.

The government has an obligation to its citizens to provide for their personal safety, to be able to respond to a police or fire emergency, and to provide medical assistance and transportation in time of need. Cutbacks in these essential services undermine the most basic and original purpose of government, which was to ensure collective safety of our citizens. Needless to say, if New Bedford does not have a safe environment for our residents, economic development and growth will not take place.

I am confident that we will obtain additional funds from the federal and state government to restore our police and fire departments to appropriate and responsible strengths.

Project Up-Date

I believe that there are a number of projects that will get under way in the spring of 2009 that will provide immediate jobs as well as future tax revenue and permanent jobs. These projects are being developed by the private sector with assistance from federal, state and local inducements. I expect to see construction begin on the Fairhaven Mills site, the downtown hotel site, phase II of the Wamsutta Mills project, and the United Front Homes renovation. In addition, projects are in the waiting at the Regency Tower site, Victoria Riverside, Cliftex Mill #1, and the Keystone building lot.

As these projects commence, New Bedford must protect and honor its history, culture and traditions. To do otherwise casts the uniqueness of the story of the people of New Bedford aside and we become part of the homogenized landscape of later 20th Century America.

Each mill or building must be evaluated on its own merits. In a perfect world, the financial realities of each project would not be a factor in determining whether a building is rehabilitated or razed. In some cases, the financial realities will be a contributing factor; in others, it will be an obstacle which may or may not be overcome.

Once a building is removed from our neighborhoods, it is gone. Only through pictures and memories will it be found. But the essence of the building and its significance can be recaptured with planning, design and appropriate construction. We have a duty to question the removal from our City of any important structure. We have a duty to insist that whatever replaces the structure continues to highlight New Bedford's attributes and history. The historic preservation movement in New Bedford is a key partner and an integral component of the City's economic development philosophy and actions.

Our building permits remain strong and it appears that the construction season of 2009 will provide work for the residents of the City of New Bedford. Partnering with the federal government, we have a number of brownfield remediation projects that also will begin in 2009. The demolition, removal and subsequent remediation of the Aerovox site and the remediation

of Dartmouth Finishing site is scheduled to begin during this calendar year. It is all but certain that additional money will be allocated by the EPA for the continued cleanup of the Acushnet River. This will fast-track this project, leading to remediation jobs in the short-term, and in the long-term, open up the entire Acushnet River area for economic development and recreational activities.

Economic Stimulus

In order to take full advantage of these economic stimulus packages, a concentrated effort is being made by the Work Investment Board and its partners to revamp the training programs that enable individuals to return to gainful employment. It is essential that the work that comes to New Bedford be performed by as many individuals as possible in our City. This will provide a further economic stimulus which will lead to additional jobs being created in the fields of construction, retail and customer service.

School Projects

Four school projects are also in the final stages of planning. The first project that will begin is the construction of Andre McCoy Field at the former Keith Middle School site. This project will restore the recreational areas for our middle school students. This project will begin shortly. New Bedford has the oldest elementary school building stock in the state. It is our intention to begin replacing these with architecturally appropriate modern educational facilities that will provide the finest educational opportunities for our children. The first elementary school building project is the replacement of the current Lincoln School. This project should begin within the next several months and falls within the Massachusetts School Building Authority financing program which provides for the state to pay 90% of the cost of the new school. Within the next two years, the Sea Lab building, which now houses the Hannigan Elementary School, will have a small addition constructed to provide for appropriate learning and recreational space for the students. This project will save millions of dollars as it will

eliminate the need to build a new elementary school. While serving as an elementary school, the Sea Lab building will continue to provide oceanographic educational opportunities for all of our students on a year-round basis, and will be the centerpiece facility for the summer Sea Lab programs. At the current Hannigan site, a new school will be constructed which will complete the decade-old approved MSBA building program. Once these buildings are completed, at least five schools over 90 years old, and some over 100 years old, will have been replaced by new educational facilities. All of these construction projects will provide jobs and economic opportunities for the people and businesses of New Bedford.

These projects, when completed, will expand our local tax base which will help lighten the burden on our taxpayers.

Transportation

The Federal stimulus programs have highlighted transportation projects for funding. Senator Kerry has indicated that he has specifically targeted federal funding to help build the south coast rail project. There is no doubt, Mr. Secretary, that Governor Patrick is fully committed to this project. At the present time, the Patrick administration is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to ascertain all permitting options for constructing the rail and to determine the best route upon which it is to be built. On behalf of the people of New Bedford, I state that the time to build the south coast rail project from New Bedford to Taunton and Fall River to Taunton is now, today. The route is clear—the existing north-south rail bed. The need to positively impact our local economies is at this time. There is no reason to delay the southern section of this project. Regardless of which route the track follows to Boston, all points north or west or east, begin in Taunton. This rail project would inject hundreds of millions of dollars into our state's economy now. Approximately one thousand construction jobs would be created. Let's seize the moment, expedite the federal and state permitting process, and start laying track. By the time we reach Taunton, all of the other questions regarding the

route and permitting of the project will have been resolved and we will be on our way to building the rail to Boston. To reiterate, let's start building the rail now.

The airport has a number of different federal projects in the planning stages, all of which will improve the flight utility and safety at the airport. In the past year, the airport has seen an additional rental car company locate at the terminal. The terminal will also soon be host to a first-rate restaurant. The Bridgewater State College flight school is now fully operational at the airport, which will increase takeoff and landing statistics and provide economic opportunities for our private support service companies at the airport. The future for the New Bedford Regional Airport looks very bright and stable. All the efforts at the airport have increased commerce, employment, educational and recreational opportunities for our citizenry.

The Route 18 project, which has been in the planning stage for almost a decade, is slated to begin actual construction in 2009. Again, this should provide jobs for our citizens and economic stimulus for our local construction providers. There are significant highway and infrastructure projects that will commence throughout 2009, including separating sewer and groundwater. These projects include, the cleaning and rehabilitation of the Route 18 separator, the construction of sidewalks, curb and road repair and installation, and tree maintenance and plantings. Many of these projects will be funded by state and federal programs that are specifically designed to put people back to work. In some cases, these projects will enable the City of New Bedford to continue to employ dedicated employees who have made a career serving the people of our City.

Port of New Bedford

It is impossible to discuss the Port of New Bedford without recognizing the sacrifices the fishing families of our City make each day. The fishing families' most difficult days are when one of their own loses their life while pursuing their seafaring calling. On November 12, 2008,

Captain Antonio Mesquita was lost at sea when the New Bedford Fishing Vessel, Costa & Corvo, capsized and sank. Our hearts, prayers and sympathy go out to Captain Mesquita's family and the fishing community.

New Bedford is once again the number one fishing port in the country and one of the top fishing ports in the world. Our seafood processing capabilities are second to none. The City and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth SMAST, as well as ports throughout New England and the east coast have joined together to advocate, and when necessary, to litigate for real changes in the fishery regulatory scheme administered by N.O.A.A. The ground fish industry's future depends upon this alliance of fishermen, scientists, processors, public servants and citizens to successfully amend the over-broad framework and regulations promulgated by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Under the leadership of Dr. Brian Rothschild, who chairs the Mayor's Ocean and Fisheries Council we will continue to devote its attention and resources to work with our fishing industry and the university to bring about a system of conservation that also provides for the economic vitality of our fleet.

The port has seen an increase in import/export cargo at a level that surpasses the average annual man-hours of the past decade. It is very important to New Bedford to continue to develop a deep sea cargo and short sea shipping component to our port's economy. In addition, the recreational boating sector of the Port of New Bedford continues to grow and co-exist very well with the priority of maintaining our fishing fleet.

In the near future, the City will begin to see the first recreational boating on the Acushnet River in generations. The Acushnet River will once again be a tremendous asset from a recreational and economic standpoint for our City. Throughout this year, extensive dredging projects will be underway in the harbor and upper harbor. The dredging will allow for the free movement of commerce throughout the port and is designed to serve the fishing industry.

New Model of Government

Where do we go from here? For New Bedford to weather this economic storm, we must come together. Each of us must contribute in our own way. First, we must have a realistic conversation about what our City government can and should achieve in these difficult financial times. Government revenue is down, so our governmental workforce has necessarily contracted. The question is, how do we accomplish the same, or when necessary, more, with fewer personnel and less resources. The answer is readily apparent—not easily, not in the same manner of operation. We must change our approach to problem solving. We need to challenge former assumptions on how to meet a goal.

Let's think differently. Let's challenge the status quo belief that something can't be done—and let's find new innovative ways to accomplish goals. Going forward, for future employees, we must be creative in establishing a new model for government in the 21st Century. The current model of municipal government is based upon the industrial model of post-World War II America. The industrial model in the private sector has shown not to be sustainable, and municipal government as we know it today can no longer be sustained either.

Shortly after World War II, municipalities in offering positions, traditionally paid less in the way of wages and offered enhanced benefits in order to attract qualified individuals. Over the years, these benefit packages have increased either to keep up with inflationary trends or to continue to justly reward the governmental employees. At the same time, due to the original inequities in compensation, the salary levels of municipal employees have reached parity and in some cases, surpassed the private sector compensation in many areas. A computation of total compensation packages for a municipal employee versus a private sector employee now reveals that in many cases the municipal employee's fully-loaded costs surpass the private sector employee. The private sector employee's livelihood is based on the goods or services that the private sector company produces. As the private sector shows growth, the employee is rewarded. When the private sector's company market share goes down, it leads to either

cutbacks or layoffs. A municipal employee's compensation is paid for through federal, state and local tax dollars or revenues raised by fees. The taxpayers who provide the revenue are not an inexhaustible source of money. At a certain point, the people who provide revenue to the government are unable to pay any more. Further complicating the problem of raising governmental revenue is when the economy recedes and the revenues shrink; this has happened very quickly in dramatic fashion.

In order for local government to continue to survive in a meaningful way in the 21st Century, the cost of providing services has to be compatible with the amount of revenue that is received by the local government. The costs have to be cut; the revenue will not continue to rise, especially in this economy. For example, we know that people not buying new cars equates to less sales tax and less excise tax to the government. Houses in foreclosure means a decline in property values and less real estate taxes being generated. The losses in the stock market translate into less capital gains tax being paid. Joblessness means less employment taxes are collected. All of these dire consequences and all of these exist at this point in time. As a result, the people and families of New Bedford cannot afford to pay any additional costs for government. Yet, the needs of the people in New Bedford will continue. Crime won't go into a recession, children must be educated, fires will not put themselves out; individuals needing emergency medical care won't miraculously heal or transport themselves to the hospital. City light bulbs won't regenerate, and potholes and street repair won't cease to exist. A City of 100,000 people will continue to need all the services that an urban area requires.

Time for New Bedford to Lead

It is New Bedford's time to lead in establishing a new framework for future employees to build careers working for our municipal government while providing the finest quality services to our citizens in the most cost-effective way.

A new employment model must be developed for future employees of our City. Health insurance and pensions must be tied to the financial feasibility of paying for the benefit and begin to reflect the reality of our economic circumstances. In our City, we face enormous future deficits as we attempt to fund the unfunded liabilities in the pension plan and potentially in the future, for annual health costs bills. These unfunded liabilities will dictate how many individuals are employed by our City. Future layoffs will be necessary to pay the unfunded liabilities owed to the City employees and, ironically, to the laid off workers.

Each benefit must be examined to determine its cost. It is irresponsible to continue with a system that relies upon unfunded benefits to reward employees. Each and every benefit that we provide must be paid for with cash on the barrel-head in the fiscal year they are earned—either paying the benefits currently or contributing to self-sustaining funds that will pay the employees the benefits due at the time they are due, without drawing down on the City's general fund in any given year.

The unions in the City of New Bedford can take this opportunity to look forward and help restore a sustainable employment model for the City and the state. Employees who currently have dedicated their careers and who have relied upon our City's contracts will not be affected, but future employees should have the opportunity to work under a model that will provide them with long careers without the scepter of layoffs or interrupted careers hanging over their heads with each new fiscal year or economic cycle looming.

Let us be clear, this unprecedented economic crisis in the modern era threatens our ability to police our streets, provide firefighting abilities, transport our infirmed, educate our children, provide assistance to our seniors and honor our veterans. It affects all of us.

The same spirit of unity at the time of greatest challenges our nation needs to be summoned again. New Bedford and its unions can lead the way and set an example for the state and country.

In addition, it is my belief that there are tremendous efficiencies of scale to be achieved through the regionalization of some services that our local governments provide. New Bedford is the largest city in Southeastern Massachusetts, and has substantial capacity in several key areas. Our City should be relied upon by our neighboring towns to provide certain appropriate government services. For example, New Bedford can be the provider of Veterans regional services, of 911 call center regional services, of regional Department of Public Health Services, of regional Council on Aging Services. New Bedford can be called upon for work that requires heavy equipment, and capacity, to name just a few areas of regional cooperative efforts.

Education

The New Bedford School Committee selected Dr. Portia Bonner as its new superintendent in April of 2008. Dr. Bonner has focused on establishing an educational plan to enhance the educational opportunities for all our children. The School Department and the School Committee's concentration on providing each child with an education geared to the unique talents of each individual student. New Bedford's school system continues to develop programs designed to increase the high school graduation rate and keep young people engaged in the pursuit of academic excellence.

The financial circumstances for this coming fiscal year will be challenging as it is anticipated that Educational Chapter 70 funding will be, at its best, level funded, although it is anticipated that federal education allocations will be increased to enable full funding of classroom services.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership and staff at Normandin Middle School for being designated as a Spotlight Middle School. I'd like to congratulate Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School, under the expert direction of Mike Shea, for its excellent achievements and graduation rates.

Educational Partners

Our City has cultivated a relationship with excellent institutions of higher learning. The City and the School Department currently have programs or projects in place with the following colleges, universities, or governmental agencies: UMass Dartmouth, Bristol Community College, Bridgewater State College, Northeastern University, Harvard University, M.I.T., and the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, among many others actively involved with our students.

Partnerships

In 2008, our City government forged strong beneficial alliances throughout the public and private sectors through common vision and goals, commitments and programs. The City received invaluable technical assistance and grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Environment Protection, Mass. Economic Development, Mass. Housing and Economic Development, Mass. Office of Tourism, The Lincoln Institute, the Marion Institute, the Jacobs Foundation, the Mass. Sports Foundation, to name only a few of our partners.

We welcome to New Bedford our new National Park Superintendent Jennifer Nersesian, the new Executive Director of the Whaling Museum, James Russell, the New England Collegiate Baseball Team, the New Bedford Bay Sox, the new location for the New Bedford Ballet and the establishment of Our Sisters School.

Volunteerism

The economy in New Bedford may be extremely challenging and difficult, but the spirit of the people New Bedford remains very strong. Each day, I see throughout the City, individuals and organizations performing charitable work or benevolent deeds to help their fellow citizens. Since we last gathered, there have literally been dozens upon dozens of benefit events to help so many worthy causes in our area. The event may be for an injured worker, a sick child, a family that has suffered a loss in a fire, scholarships for our young men and women, events to assist the families of men and women in the armed forces or veterans in need, or perhaps it has been organizations stepping forward to assist the City in rolling out the

red carpet for hundreds of thousands of guests who visit New Bedford each year. The strength of New Bedford is its people and their willingness to join together, either around service organizations, cultural organizations, or through their neighborhood houses of worship, to provide care, comfort and assistance for life-long friends or anonymous strangers. New Bedford's heart beats very strongly and is not affected by either outside forces or economic constraints.

As in the past, the destiny of New Bedford lies in its people. Over the last several years, the City government, working with the business associations, the neighborhoods, and the benevolent organizations, have spurred economic development through the hosting of many great events, whether it has been our nationally-renowned Portuguese feasts, Summerfest, the Whaling City Festival, the Working Waterfront Festival, AHA Nights, Fifties Night, the Zeiterion Theatre, the Festival Theatre, the Whaling Museum, the National Park, the Buttonwood Park Zoo, the Military Museum at Fort Rodman, the New Bedford Symphony, and the premier road race in the region, the New Bedford Half-Marathon. Each organization that is involved in these activities deserves tremendous accolades and thanks from the people of New Bedford; they help define the uniqueness of our City and help other local businesses.

Other volunteer efforts include the continued efforts by our parent-teacher organizations, our youth baseball leagues, girls' softball, our basketball, football and soccer organizations throughout the City. New Bedford is a fine example of responsible adults working with young people, whether it is mentoring in the SMILES program which continues to grow daily, or working as a coach, with a scouting program, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, Dennison Memorial, Community Boating or Operation Clean Sweep, or working with the various dance, drama and choral groups. The volunteer spirit in New Bedford continues to grow. New Bedford is as strong as its communities and neighborhoods and I can report today that New Bedford is in robust condition.

In closing, I believe the future of New Bedford is very bright. We have natural resources, assets and attributes that are the envy of most cities in America. We have a citizenry that cares about each other and our City. We are recognized throughout our region, and the east coast, as a city that is identifying its problems and seeking creative solutions one by one. We have dynamic and powerful partners in the private, public and non-profit sectors, who have invested in New Bedford and its people, and want our City to succeed. We have a home-town city that welcomes any and all people who seek to live in a responsible, productive manner as fellow citizens. We have dedicated public servants and employees who strive to improve our City each day. New Bedford has the richest living history, culture and diversity in all of the United States. An economic downturn, an economic recession, the great recession, or worse will not and cannot deter this City or its people from attaining the goal of being a place where we can safely and proudly live and raise our families. It is my unwavering belief that if we stand united and truly care for, and sacrifice for each other, New Bedford will successfully meet all challenges at this point and time and into the future.

I look forward to continuing to serve the people of New Bedford. God bless this City and its people.

Thank you.